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Inside Information

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COMMUNICATIONS AT THE CROSSROADS

"Communications at the Crossroads" is the theme of the annual conference of the National Association of Government Communicators, to be held Nov. 14-16 at the Rosslyn West Park Hotel in Arlington, Va.

This is the year of decision for federal, state and local government communicators, according to conference chairperson Vince Phillips, deputy assistant to the Secretary of Agriculture for public liaison.

"We are buffeted by the wind of the technological change bringing both a threat to the established way and the opportunity to become more effective," Phillips said. "We also live with budgetary realities of being called to do more with fewer resources at our disposal. The NAGC chose the 'crossroads' theme because we, as a profession, face serious choices with which we must live in years to come."

The NAGC conference will explore the rapidly changing role of federal, state and local government communications, presented through open sessions and workshops revolving around five tracks: (1) Broadcasting, (2) high-tech in government communications, (3) management and professional skills, (4) publishing and marketing, and (5) speechwriting and presentation.

Through the series of workshops and general sessions, Phillips said conference attendees will explore the latest technological advances in the communications field; learn the latest techniques in each area of expertise; hear top national speakers in communications; identify and learn to counteract public relations problems before, not after, they become crises; share information, skills and knowledge with others; and discover how to get a bigger bang for limited communications bucks.

Purpose of the annual NAGC conference and workshops is to train and assist government communicators and others involved in public affairs to develop skills and competencies, and share knowledge, attitudes and insights. The conference qualifies as authorized employee training under provisions of the Federal Personnel Manual and under training programs in state governments.

Registration fees for members of NAGC is \$195 and for nonmembers \$230. NAGC membership fees are \$35 a year. Hotel space is blocked for the NAGC conference until Oct. 19. For further information, write to NAGC, 80 South Early Street, Alexandria, VA 22304, or call (703) 823-4831.

AGRICULTURAL CALENDARS INCH FORWARD

Some newspapers, radio stations and tv stations know exactly what's going on agriculturally throughout their circulation/broadcast areas at any given time. A lot of them don't.

All of them could probably use a reminder. That's the theory advanced by John Crowley, public affairs specialist in the Special Programs Division of USDA's Office of Information.

Crowley remembers his days as a city editor on a metropolitan daily when feature ideas were always welcome. Many of them occurred seasonally, he notes.

He also remembers when the Office of Information was asked by a book publisher for locations and times of various kinds of harvesting, so that generic scenes could be photographed.

Why couldn't each state prepare a calendar of agricultural activities within that state? Some story ideas and appropriate contacts could be added.

Crowley prepared a prototype and published it this spring. It's called "Maryland Agriculture."

The concerned media seem to like it. Even some of the non-Maryland-area press--such as in New York City--liked it, Crowley says.

Now information officials in the state of Virginia have started work on their version of the calendar. Becky Sirles, an information officer in the Virginia Department of Agriculture is working toward a first-of-the-year deadline on publication. Her coworker in the effort is Terry Canup, manager of the Extension Information Office at Virginia Tech.

Crowley was happy to encourage the Virginia calendar and encourages others to start. He has gathered preliminary information on North Carolina and California.

Anyone wishing a copy of the prototype, "Maryland Agriculture," may obtain one by writing to Crowley, Room 536-A, Office of Information, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250, or by sending a request to him via Dialcom electronic mailbox AGR009, or by telephoning his office at (202) 447-5881.

TOP BOSSES GRADUALLY GO ELECTRONIC

The number of business executives who use computers and word processors or have electronic work stations in their offices is growing--not quite a stampede but growing nevertheless.

According to Research & Forecasts Inc. in INDUSTRY WEEK, 45% of today's executives have a computer in the office and 41% have one at home. More than 60% of 105 executives surveyed use computers in their business.

The increasing use of personal computers by managers already is changing the workplace, according to a story in USA TODAY.

For one thing, managers will be forced to distinguish between access to more information and better decision-making. In fact, information overload may impede, not improve, their decision-making skills.

On the other hand, duties and salaries of secretaries will be upgraded as more managers use word processors to compose and type their own letters, freeing secretaries' time for other tasks. Some executives report that trend already has taken hold.

And, for those executives who are reluctant to use a computer because they can't type--and who associate keyboard with non-prestigious secretarial work--more computers without keyboards are being designed and marketed.

CASE COMMUNICATIONS WEEK SCHEDULED

The 1984 "Communications Week" sponsored by the Council for Advancement and Support of Education will be held Nov. 26-30 at the Westin Hotel Copley Place in Boston, Mass.

Six different practical workshops are scheduled during the 5-day period:

- Making your news service more effective, Nov. 26-27
- Writing for periodicals, publications and promotions, Nov. 28
- Covering research creatively, Nov. 29
- Word processing/computer typesetting; making buying decision, Nov. 28
- Improving independent school periodicals, Nov. 26
- Designing for student recruitment, Nov. 30.

According to the CASE conference brochure, agricultural communicators can benefit from any one or several of the programs.

Others being encouraged to attend are editors, graphic designers, staff writers, production managers, public affairs specialists, news service writers, periodical editors, science writers and editors and information specialists who cover research news.

Registration fees for the different workshops range from \$205 for the word processing program (\$165 for members of CASE-member organizations) to \$280 for the effective news service workshop (\$225 for members). All other sessions cost \$235 (\$195 for members).

Registrations and fees must be received no later than Nov. 19; deadline for the Westin Hotel reservations is Nov. 2.

For more details and registration forms, contact CASE, Suite 400, Dupont Circle, Washington, DC 20036. Or call Metro World Travel Service, which will handle the registration and make air reservations in one easy step, at (800) 824-5426 (in Washington, D.C., area call 293-5010).

USDA COMMUNICATOR TO CHAIR 'GOLDSCREEN'

David Carter, broadcast specialist with USDA's Economics Management Staff, has been chosen to serve as chair again of the annual "Gold Screen" competition sponsored by the National Association of Government Communicators.

Carter, who chaired the 1984 contest, said entries more than doubled last year, and his committee expects even more entries for 1985.

Details of the annual 1985 Gold Screen, as well as the annual NAGC "Blue Pencil" competition, will be released later. USDA and state communicators are encouraged to enter their products in the annual competitions.

'MAIN STREET' VIDEOCONFERENCE A SUCCESS

Nearly 500 small communities around the country took part in a national videoconference Sept. 18.

Called "Revitalizing Downtown," it was seen by an audience of more than 13,000 local government officials and businesspeople, who took part in what was billed as a "nationwide town meeting via cable and satellite."

The 5-1/2-hour program focused on how small communities can organize and implement downtown rejuvenation projects. Cost of the production was \$160,000 not counting costs at receiving sites.

National Trust for Historic Preservation, National Endowment for the Arts and USDA cosponsored the precedent-setting event.

ARBORETUM ATTRACTS 500,000 A YEAR

It should be easy to sell anything so big that it occupies 444 acres inside a major metropolitan city like Washington, D.C. Right?

Well, ask Erik A. Neumann, curator of education for the National Arboretum, a USDA institution (and part of USDA's Agricultural Research Service). Neumann says there are problems. Still, there have been some brilliant moments.

Neumann describes the Arboretum as one of the most under visited tourist attractions in the nation's Capital. "Only" about 500,000 persons visit its 30 gardens each year, he says.

Some of its best moments, from a public relations point of view, have come when the Arboretum opened something new to the public.

The press coverage both locally and nationally was terrific, Neumann says, when the Arboretum unveiled its new collection of 53 heirloom bonsai, the bicentennial gift of the Nippon Bonsai Association of Japan, and when the National Herb Garden was opened on the grounds.

But the regularly scheduled lectures, tours, nature walks and other such public events have met with a lot less enthusiasm in the media. There has been little response to requests for public service announcements of such events.

So the Arboretum staff established a mailing list of 6,000 persons. The result was good attendance at some events and poor attendance at others.

Now, since the arrival of Dr. Henry M. Cathey as director of the Arboretum in June 1981, public response to the Arboretum is warming, Neumann says.

"His enthusiastic 'P.T. Barnum' style won an enthusiastic audience on local radio and television," Neumann says. "His weekly call-in radio program has attracted a large following and resulted in a dramatic increase in attendance for all of the Arboretum's programs offered to the public."

A series of monthly educational programs called "Living Legends" is attracting many new visitors. They are held on the first Sunday and Wednesday of each month.

Increased participation in local and national flower shows has brought increased visibility. Participation in trade shows such as the Gro Show in nearby Baltimore, Md., has provided exposure to the nursery and florist trade.

Local organizations sponsor flower shows each year in an appropriate hall on the grounds. Publicity for these is handled by the plant society involved.

Neumann and other staff members appear regularly on radio and television shows, including USDA programs that are broadcast nationwide.

The Arboretum's research program plays an important public relations role. Articles describing its many plant introductions appear in trade and popular garden magazines.

Meanwhile, new additions to the grounds continue to work their magic on the public's attention. The Asian Valley, Court of Honor, and National Country Garden are attracting new audiences and enticing return trips.

A new garden featuring the original Latrobe columns from the east front of the Capitol Building, one of many gifts made to the Arboretum, is expected to open soon. A new Plant Life Center is proposed.

INSIDE INFORMATION is published for distribution to public affairs and information staff members of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, its agencies, State Departments of Agriculture and Land Grant Universities. Any items, comments and inquiries should be addressed to either John Crowley or Nancy Bevis, Office of Information, Room 536A, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250 or to AGRO02 mailbox on the Dialcom system, or call (202) 447-7454.

